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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1034
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000423

SIPDIS

FOR EAP/MTS AND INR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: PAS LEADER FAVORS TAKING POWER THROUGH NEXT
ELECTION; SNAP POLLS POSSIBLE

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 408 - MAHATHIR RESIGNS
[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 377 - EAST MALAYSIA DEFECTIONS
[1](#)C. KUALA LUMPUR 364 - ON EDGE OR STABILIZING?

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF MARK D. CLARK, REASON 1.4 (B AND D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Nasaruddin Mat Isa, Deputy President of the Islamist opposition party PAS, speaking with us on May 21, said the opposition should seek to take power through the next federal election, rather than through immediate defections by ruling coalition MPs, in part to reduce the risk of a harsh crackdown by the National Front government. PAS leaders are geared up for possible snap national elections, but opposition parties would not rerun elections in the five states they control. Nasaruddin linked Mahathir's surprise resignation from the UMNO party with the Cabinet's decision to release a prominent report on judicial corruption that implicates the former Prime Minister. End Summary.

Elections, Not Defections

[1](#)2. (C) Nasaruddin Mat Isa, Deputy President of the opposition Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and Member of Parliament, told us on May 21 that PAS was not very happy with talk of ruling National Front (BN) Members of Parliament crossing over to the opposition Peoples Alliance and thus bringing down the BN government (refs B and C). PAS leadership believed that the Alliance at this juncture should maintain the current political status quo and strengthen their administration in the five opposition-held states. Once the opposition parties can demonstrate to the public that they can deliver, the people will support the Peoples Alliance and topple the BN government in the next election. Furthermore, even if enough BN MPs were to cross over to the Alliance, UMNO and BN leaders will not give up power easily. By virtue of his position, PM Abdullah is still very powerful, and "he still has the option of declaring emergency rule" or using the Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain UMNO's opponents, although Nasaruddin quickly added Abdullah "is no Mahathir" (i.e., not as likely to use authoritarian methods).

Snap Polls Possible, But Not in Opposition States

[1](#)3. (C) PAS leaders were geared up for Prime Minister Abdullah calling a snap election if the current "political impasse persists in UMNO," Nasaruddin said. He stressed, however, that if the PM dissolves Parliament, the Alliance will not follow suit in dissolving the state legislative

assemblies of the five states under their control. An MP from Anwar Ibrahim's Peoples Justice Party (PKR) who joined us, nodded in agreement. (Note: State governments need not follow the federal electoral cycle, though in recent history all states except Sarawak have held elections coinciding with the national polls. End Note.)

Mahathir's UMNO Resignation Linked to Judicial Probe

¶4. (C) Nasaruddin pointed out proudly that it was a PAS member who "brought down" Mahathir by precipitating the former Prime Minister's decision to resign from UMNO (ref A). (Note: At a public forum on May 19, Mahathir called on UMNO members to leave the party temporarily as the only way to bring down PM Abdullah. Reportedly, one member of the audience who turned out to be a PAS member dared the former PM to lead the way in leaving the party, and Mahathir obliged on the spot. End Note.)

¶5. (C) In addition, Nasaruddin contended that Mahathir's shock May 19 announcement was influenced by the Cabinet's decision on May 16 to publish the Royal Commission report probing allegations of corruption in the judiciary (the Linggam inquiry). The report concluded that six prominent government and judicial figures including Mahathir were involved in the manipulation of appointments of top judges for political purposes. The PAS leader speculated that the publication of the photographs of six personalities in the front pages of newspapers even before the Attorney General Chambers started its investigation must have angered the former PM who felt that his legacy was crumbling. In the

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rural areas, particularly in the Malay heartland, the six photographs are shown at evening rallies (ceramahs) associating them with a famous 1960s Malay movie "Enam Jahanam" (or "Doomed Six").
KEITH